

Historic Preservation Review Board
Staff Report And Recommendation

Property Address: **1905-09 Martin Luther King Avenue SE**

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District**

Meeting Date: **July 30, 2020**

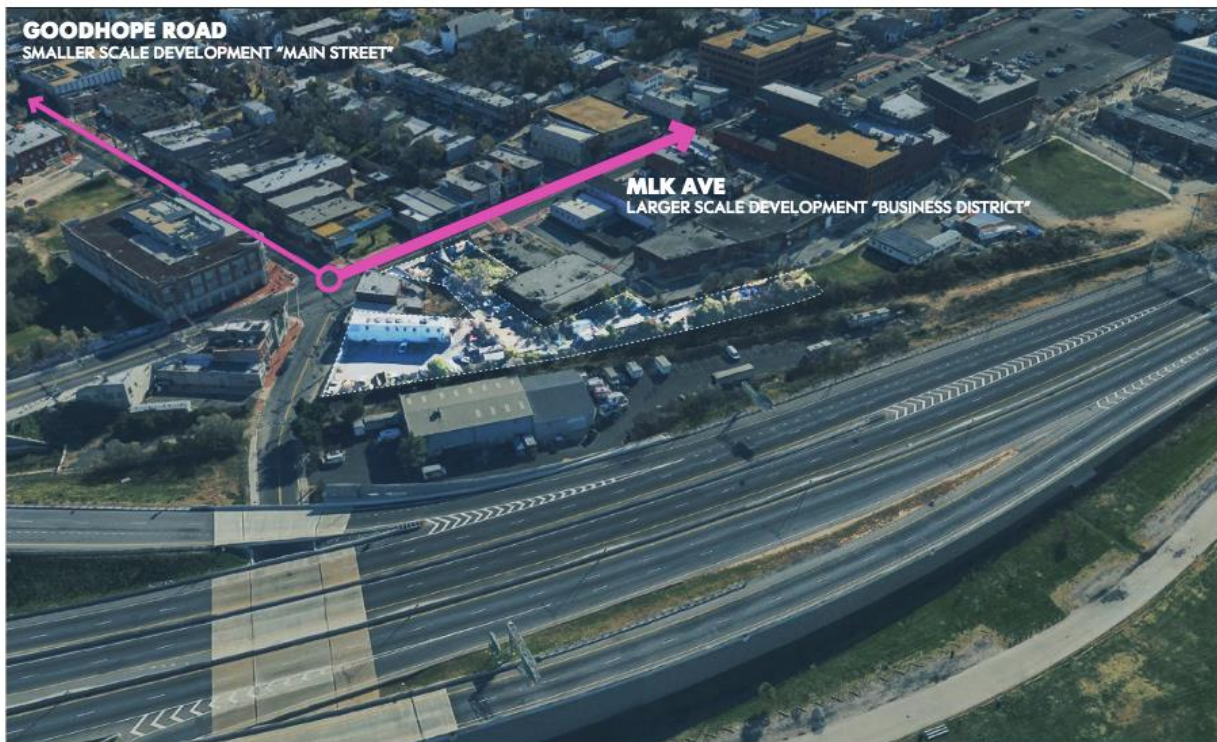
H.P.A. Number: **20-0708**

(X) Agenda

(X) New Construction

(X) Subdivision

(X) Concept Review



On behalf of the Menkiti Group, Studios Architecture seeks concept design review for a four-story office and retail new construction project called MLK Gateway II. This application is to replace the previously-approved plan for a portion of this site approved by the Board several years ago (HPA 17-592).

Property Description

The project site is bounded by Good Hope Road SE, Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, and U Street SE. It is comprised of 7 lots, five of which are vacant. Of the other two lots, 1901 MLK Jr. Avenue is occupied by a one-story contributing commercial building (to be retained) and 1110 U Street is occupied by a one-story non-contributing industrial structure (to be demolished). The site is split zoned MU-7 along eastern portion along MLK and PDR-1 on the western portion.

Project Proposal

The project calls for a 4-story commercial office building with an occupied penthouse floor and two levels of below-grade parking. The ground level facing MLK Jr. Avenue would be retail, with the office building lobby and garage and loading entrances along U Street. At the intersection of Shannon Place with U Street, a curb-cut is proposed to allow for access to a loading driveway that will circulate along the western property edge north toward a central loading area north of the main building mass. From that same curb-cut, access would be provided to off-street surface parking in a narrow one-way angled-parking lot on Parcel 5771-1025 that exits to another curb cut further south on Shannon Place.

The building's roof height would be to the 50-foot height limit with a penthouse to balance the allowable zoning density on the site with the massing transitioning from one-story up to taller building heights along MLK. The architecture is broken into two major façade elements: an eastern, MLK Jr. Avenue-facing, "A" façade, that ends at U Street and a western, highway-facing, "B" façade. The A façade is intended to be articulated brick with ground-level projecting storefront windows. This architecture is articulated with rhythmic bays, expressed in two or three bay widths. The B façade is more contemporary, with a simple framed expression that will be visible from the highway and the transition from 11th Street into MLK Jr. Avenue.

The building gradually transitions from one to four stories in height. The three-story expression on the corner matches the 4-story building height, but provides a double-height retail storefront at the corner to compensate for the site grade, rising approximately four feet as it goes south down MLK Jr. Avenue. The four-story building mass is set back from the street-frontage, with opportunities for outdoor terraces on the lower levels.

As the sidewalk along MLK Jr. Avenue is only 12 feet wide, with no street trees, the building frontage will be set back approximately eight feet from the front property line to provide a more generous pedestrian environment and the opportunity for outdoor seating. The retail storefronts seen in the architectural views project into the eight-foot set back private space area. 1901 MLK Jr. Ave, as an existing historic building, will remain with its façade at the property line.

Evaluation

The four corners of MLK and Good Hope Road provide prominent focal points in the neighborhood. The MLK Gateway II project is visible from several views into the Historic Anacostia district including from the 395 highway. As a large project, special design considerations should be considered to ensure development of an historic commercial corridor is rich in character and consistent with the Historic Anacostia District.

The demolished historic buildings at 1901 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue (below) represented early purpose-built commercial buildings in Anacostia at this prominent location. While the community and HPO tried to save those buildings, they ultimately collapsed due to neglect. Similar to the previously-approved proposal (HPA 17-592) on this site, this proposal does not intend to reconstruct the former buildings but seeks to evoke their spirit, height and scale through its massing, storefronts and use of patterned brick.

The eastern, MLK Jr. Avenue facing "A" façade is similar to the height variation along Good Hope Road with the approved MLK Gateway I project. The scale of the buildings fronting MLK, while larger than the historic one to two-story buildings, are compatible with the character of the historic district. The fenestration along the "A" façade breaks up the continuous brick buildings into segments that relate to the three bay buildings in the district, and the use of patterned brick is consistent with the brick historic commercial buildings in the historic district. As the design continues to be developed, the storefronts

should be re-designed to have a lower height and smaller scale more in proportion to the storefronts found in the historic district. It is also recommended that the height of the parapet wall on the end building adjacent to U Street should be raised slightly, and that the applicants coordinate with staff on the brick selection and detailing.

The “B” façade doesn’t relate as well to the historic district as the “A” façade. While

located partially outside the boundaries of the historic district, which provides a rationale for greater design flexibility, this is the side that faces the highway and provides an important view into the historic district. While the rear façade does not need to resemble or reflect the historic character of the buildings on MLK Avenue, further design consideration of the repetitive metal paneling material and the continuous single pane fenestration could improve the relationship of this portion of the building with the MLK-facing façade and the historic district.

Overall, the building is within the scale of new construction projects in the historic district, and will not overwhelm the character of smaller one to two story historic building across the street.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the height, massing and general design direction of the project to be compatible with the character of the historic district, but that refinement of the storefronts and additional study of the “B” façade be undertaken to improve the project’s compatibility with the historic district.

1909 MLK (PRE-COLLAPSE)

